

Bank Building (Demolished 1959)
California and Leidesdorff Streets
San Francisco, California

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction
1000 Geary Street
San Francisco, California

PHOTOGRAPH - DATA BOOK REPORT
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

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BANK BUILDING (Demolished 1959)

ADDRESS: Northwest corner of California and Leidesdorff
Streets, San Francisco, California

OWNER: Original: Bank of London and San Francisco
Last: Wells Fargo Bank - American Trust Company

PRESENT

CONDITION: Torn down to make way for new headquarters building
for present Owner

Main entrance at San Francisco Maritime Museum.
Second story window and pediment at Oakland
Municipal Art Museum.

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Rare example of cast iron building facade designed
in classic style with four Orders of Architecture represented,
first story Roman Doric, second story Ionic, third story Corin-
thian, and Composite window colonettes. Built in 1873, survived
1906 earthquake and fire.

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

This building was constructed in 1873 for the Bank
of London and San Francisco from designs by Architect David
Farquaharson. It stood on the northwest corner of California
and Leidesdorff Streets in the heart of the financial district
of San Francisco. As originally built it was a three-story and
basement building, and the facades on both streets were entirely
of cast iron, pre-cast in the Fulton Foundry of Hinckley & Co.,
San Francisco. The style was classic revival, but baroquish in
character, with three-quarter columns and deep reveals with col-
onettes and combinations of pediments and arches - circular and
flattened.

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The ground story was in the Roman Doric Order, the second story Ionic, and the third story Corinthian, all complete with respective entablatures. The window arches at all stories except the ground were supported by colonettes of the Composite Order. The corner of the building was splayed and contained the main entrance to the banking room. Over this entrance the cornice of the Doric Order was extended out to form a marquee, surmounted with a cartouche or shield (probably the emblem of the bank) which was supported by haunched animals on either side. This entrance hood which projected about 7 feet from the building line, was supported by over-sized bolsters on either side of the arched entrance, which in turn were supported by cast iron torsos of Atlas with bulging muscles, and which formed the caps of reverse tapered pilasters richly ornamented with mouldings, swatches and other classic ornamental motives.

The second floor in the Ionic Order had a deeply revealed pediment with free-standing colonettes at the corner bay. The corner bay at the third floor in the Corinthian Order had less reveal and fewer architectural elements. Surmounting it all was an elaborate and overpowering segmental pediment at the splayed corner, which in turn was surmounted by a baroque niche and more ornamental castings. Extending to either side was a balustrade parapet with urns and more baroque elements over the building entrance at the end bay on California Street, and the terminal bay on Leidesdorff Street.

The building entrance and the bays directly above were, also, more elaborately detailed, though not as elaborate as the corner entrance. The California Street facade consisted of two additional bays between the corner entrance and the building entrance with coupled columns in their respective Orders, tiered above each other, separating the bays. The bays on the ground floor were filled with one large flattened arched window, and on each floor above with double arched windows within a flattened arch.

By a later remodeling the cast iron animals and the shield were removed from the marquee over the entrance, and a scroll-like ornament substituted; and a fourth attic story was added to the building. This resulted in the removal of the segmental pediment and the baroque architecture above; and with the addition of attic story windows interspersed with richly ornamented panels, and with the considerable refinement of the

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main cornice the proportions and architecture of the building, as a whole, were greatly enhanced. With this remodeling the full entablature for the Corinthian Order was added. This entablature as the architrave, together with the attic windows forming the frieze and the main cornice, formed the entablature for the building as a whole, in the classic proportions.

The facade on Leidesdorff Street was carried out in the same respective Orders, except that it was composed of seven bays of single columns and windows and terminated in a bay similar to the terminal bay on California Street.

The building was completely gutted by fire after the 1906 earthquake, and the flammable interior was destroyed; but the cast iron withstood both earthquake and fire, and was renovated and remodeled by architects Burnham, of Chicago, and Willis Polk, of San Francisco. The reconstruction of the interior was done in steel, cement and brick as required for a Class A building. The interiors were executed in plaster with pilasters and deeply coffered ceilings in classic motives.

The design and detail of the structure is intricate in detail and ornament; and is a tribute to the master craftsmen of the period who translated the design to the moulds and to the finished product. It, also, demonstrates the diligent reliance on Vignola by the architect.

The method used for producing cast iron building fronts during that period was generally as follows: First, the intricate design was moulded in clay or some other substance easily worked by a master craftsman. From these the patterns were made for the moulds into which was poured the molten iron. When finished the metal averaged 1/2- inch thick. The fronts were erected in sections of from 10 to 12 feet wide and then bolted together at the job.

An additional feature of this old building was a cast iron hitching post which weighed about a ton and stood at the curb on California Street. The tie rings were held in the mouths of animal heads surrounding the top of an ornamented shaft approximately five feet high and two feet in diameter.

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As elaborate as the description portrays the building, it stood with dignified restraint amidst even more elaborately baroquish buildings adjoining it on California Street - long since gone. Garbed in its limestone colored paint, few realized that all the facade material except the windows was cast iron.

The building incorporated many new ideas for the time of its building. There were "no permanent gas jets in the vaults, but light is introduced by means of rubber pipes that were removable at will"; and the heating and ventilating system was considered unique. "The air of feverish California Street is taken through a hollow lamp post on the sidewalk, from thence it is conveyed into boxes in which are coils of pipe."

The cast iron work was said to weigh two thousand tons and to be worth about \$50,000 at the time of building.

Since it was built the building has continuously been the home of banks. First, of course, was the Bank of London and San Francisco. When the fourth floor was added it was the property of the Bank of California who leased it to the Canadian Bank of Commerce. It finally became the property of the American Trust Company - now Wells Fargo Bank-American Trust Company - who razed the building and erected on the site in 1959 their new headquarters building.

The main entrance is being preserved at the San Francisco Maritime Museum, and the second floor window arch and pediment is at the Oakland Municipal Art Museum.

A. Lewis Koue

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This report has been developed from a study of photographs of the building taken before and after remodeling; and from information gleaned from an article published in a trade journal, "The U. S. Piper", September 1933 issue, from an article in the company magazine of Fireman's Fund Insurance Company by Fred H. Morasch, Vice President, issue of April 1951, and a clipping from a newspaper (1874) in Scrap Book No. 5, California Historical Society, San Francisco.

Approved Charles S. Pope
Architect, Historic Structures

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